



INTRODUCTION

Purpose

San Luis Obispo County seeks to conserve and protect important natural resources while balancing the needs of the natural and built environments. The County will:

- promote efforts that will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment;
- support environmental restoration;
- protect the health and welfare of the community;
- preserve ecological systems; and
- ensure long-term economic, social and environmental vitality.

Introduction

Our county has an abundance of natural resources and open space features that are fundamental to our quality of life – they define our past, sustain our day-to-day activities, and influence the prosperity of our future. These features include majestic natural landmarks, outstanding scenic vistas, important wildlife habitats, diverse natural communities, unique historic and cultural resources, vibrant lakes and creek corridors, dynamic coastal and marine environments, clean air, and bountiful soils. However, the county's special character is vulnerable to development pressure that can incrementally degrade biodiversity and threaten ecologic, historic, scenic, and other natural resources.



The County's Vision

A place that is safe, healthy, livable, prosperous, and well governed.

A Safe Community

The County will strive to create a community where all people -- adults and children alike -- have a sense of security and well being, crime is controlled, fire and rescue response is timely, and roads are safe.

A Healthy Community

The County will strive to ensure all people in our community enjoy healthy, successful, and productive lives, and have access to the basic necessities.

A Livable Community

The County will strive to keep our community a good place to live by carefully managing growth, protecting our natural resources, promoting life-long learning, and creating an environment that encourages respect for all people.

A Prosperous Community

The County will strive to keep our economy strong and viable and assure that all share in this economic prosperity.

A Well Governed Community

The County will provide high quality "results oriented" services that are responsive to community desires.

The Conservation and Open Space Element (COSE or Element) is a tool to protect and preserve these unique community resources. Conservation is the planned management, preservation, and wise utilization of natural resources and landscapes to ensure their availability in the future. Conservation means using less energy or water, using efficient technologies, and changing wasteful habits. Conserving, renewing, and restoring natural resources will assure their greatest ecologic, economic, or social benefit over time. This is necessary in order to enjoy scenic beauty and recreation, eliminate or minimize premature and unnecessary conversion of open space to urban uses, maintain public health and safety, and support a vital economy. This Conservation and Open Space Element contains goals, policies, and strategies to conserve, protect, and restore biodiversity and open space.

History

California law requires every city and county in the state to prepare and adopt a comprehensive long-range General Plan for the physical development of the jurisdiction (§65300 CA Government Code). Each General Plan must include seven mandatory elements: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, safety, and noise. General Plans may include other optional elements as desired.

The state requires conservation elements to address the following issues with regard to the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, to the extent that they are relevant locally:

- water and its hydraulic force,
- forests,
- soils,
- rivers and other waters,
- harbors,
- fisheries,
- wildlife,
- minerals, and
- other natural resources.



The discussion of water in the conservation element must be prepared in coordination with water suppliers and include any information on water supply and demand prepared pursuant to §65352.5.

To the extent that these issues are relevant locally, the open space element must address open space for:

- the preservation of natural resources,
- resource management, managed production of resources,
- outdoor recreation, and
- public health, and safety.

This Element consolidates and revises five existing elements and incorporates new material to address timely and relevant conservation issues. The consolidated elements include:¹

- 1) **Environment Plan, Conservation Element (1974):** This Element contained policies regarding water conservation, water pollution, flood control, air resources, and biological resources.
- 2) **Environment Plan, Historic Element (1974):** Contained historical and archaeological resource policies.
- 3) **Environment Plan, Esthetic Element (1974):** Contained noise, odor, and visual policies.
- 4) **Energy Element (1995):** Addressed energy conservation and efficiency, distribution and generation.
- 5) **Open Space Element (1998):** Addressed open space, scenic resources, cultural resources, biological resources,



*Wildflowers in the county.
Photo by Sue Luft.*

¹ In coordination with this Element, the County separated the Agriculture section of the 1998 Agriculture and Open Space Element and retitled it the Agriculture Element. All references to “AGP” in this Element refer to policies in the Agriculture Element.



recreation areas, natural area preserves, streams and riparian corridors, and marine resources.

This Element addresses all of the previously listed topics, as well as new issues, policies and strategies in following chapters:

- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Mineral Resources
- Open Space
- Soil Resources
- Water Resources
- Visual Resources

The County is consolidating mandatory (conservation and open space) and optional (historic, esthetic, and energy) elements for several reasons: 1) to make them easier to use; 2) to eliminate redundancy and maintain consistency; 3) to group like policies for emphasis; and 4) to address related community issues more comprehensively in one element. The State Office of Planning and Research's (OPR) General Plan Guidelines encourages combining and integrating related General Plan policies in this manner. All General Plan elements carry equal weight, and policy repetition or redundancy conveys no added legitimacy or legal standing.

Element Preparation

The Board of Supervisors directed staff to prepare this Element on August 1, 2006. This Element is the result of a collaborative effort by a wide range of County staff, community members, and professional consultants. County staff hosted workshops throughout the county to educate and inform residents about the process, to engage stakeholders in discussions, and to solicit input on the topics and priorities for inclusion in this Element. In addition, a team of County staff and partner agencies (such as the Air Pollution Control District) identified issues, information gaps, and resource needs for consideration in the consolidation and update process. County staff and professional consultants collaborated to integrate public input with research and analysis of the existing elements, the issues identified, and the desired



outcomes. The Planning Commission reviewed this Element, listened to public testimony, and recommended changes throughout twelve public hearings held during June – December 2009.

The intent of this Element is to:

- 1) Update and combine relevant conservation and open space policies from several County General Plan elements into one document so they are easier to find and use.
- 2) Apply the County's Strategic Growth Principles as the framework.
- 3) Add to, delete, or expand policies and programs in response to changing community needs and issues.
- 4) Establish the County as a leader in natural resource conservation, open space preservation, and climate protection.

New conservation and open space policies and strategies have been included to address gaps in existing elements, emerging issues and challenges, new (or anticipated) state requirements, and comments from stakeholders.

These include, but are not limited to the following.

- Requirements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from County operations and communitywide sources.
- Adaptation to climate change.
- Integration with the Resource Management System (RMS) to direct growth away from areas with constrained natural resources.
- Water and energy conservation programs.
- Integration of the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan's goals and policies to address water supply and quality issues for groundwater and surface water.
- Support of watershed management planning.



- Requirements for low impact development techniques consistent with the County's Stormwater Management Program.



A newly planted vineyard.

Photo by Sue Luft.

- Increased protection of oak woodlands and other native habitats.
- Integration of “green” building into all development.
- Increased protection of community separators and scenic corridors.
- Increased protection of archaeological sites, historically and architecturally significant buildings, and paleontological and other cultural features that contribute to “sense of place.”

FRAMEWORK: STRATEGIC GROWTH PRINCIPLES

The County's overarching land use planning framework – Strategic Growth Principles – guided the development of this Element. In 2005, the County adopted Smart Growth Principles, now called Strategic Growth Principles, to serve as planning guidelines on how growth should occur in a more sustainable manner. The principles, listed below, seek to achieve the County's mission “to enhance the economic, environmental, and social quality of life in San Luis Obispo County.”

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR STRATEGIC GROWTH²

- 1) Strengthen regional cooperation
- 2) Preserve open space, scenic, natural beauty and natural resources. Conserve energy resources. Protect agricultural land and resources.
- 3) Strengthen and direct development toward existing and strategically planned communities.
- 4) Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.

² Amended in 2009 by the Board of Supervisors.



- 5) Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- 6) Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- 7) Encourage mixed land uses.
- 8) Create walkable neighborhoods and towns
- 9) Take advantage of compact building design
- 10) Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective
- 11) Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration

The County has integrated the Strategic Growth Principles into the General Plan as goals, policies, and strategies that will:

- Sustain our most precious resources.
- Protect agriculture as an industry from rural sprawl. (See AGP 5)
- Encourage most future growth to be within existing and strategically planned cities, urban areas, and village areas in a more compact pattern.
- Give high priority to infrastructure improvements in a timely manner.
- Create conditions for more economic and civic vitality within communities.
- Locate new employment areas near customers, residential areas and transportation.

Table COSE-1 presents the chapters of this Element and identifies those that directly implement Strategic Growth Principles. While all goals, policies, and implementation strategies may not individually implement the Strategic Growth Principles, they link together to provide a comprehensive and strategic approach to natural resource conservation and protection. This approach balances the needs of the natural and built environment to ensure long-term economic, social, and environmental vitality.



Creston Valley.



**TABLE COSE-1 RELATIONSHIP OF CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE
ELEMENT TO STRATEGIC GROWTH PRINCIPLES**

Strategic Growth Principles	Conservation and Open Space Element Chapters								
	Air	Bio- logical	Cul- tural	Energy	Minerals	Open Space	Soils	Visual	Water
Strengthen Regional Cooperation.	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Preserve Open Space, Scenic, Natural Beauty & Natural Resources. Conserve Energy. Protect Agricultural land and Resources.	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Strengthen & Direct Development Toward Existing and Strategically Planned Communities.	◆			◆		◆		◆	◆
Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place.			◆					◆	
Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices.	◆			◆					
Create a Range of Housing Opportunities & Choices.	◆			◆					
Encourage Mixed Land Uses.	◆			◆					
Create Walkable Neighborhoods & Towns.	◆			◆					
Take Advantage of Compact Building Design.	◆	◆		◆		◆		◆	◆
Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair & Cost-Effective.	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆



While all of the issues, goals, policies, and implementation strategies included in this Element are fundamental to the conservation of the county's natural resources and protection of its economic and social vitality, four essential priority actions require immediate attention:

- Conserve water countywide
- Reduce vehicle-miles-traveled
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and
- Increase energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources.

Accomplishing these actions to the extent identified in this Element will contribute to the sustainability of the county's natural resources and quality-of-life. In addition, acting on each of them, will likely result in the indirect or direct achievement of another. For example, increasing the use of renewable energy resources and reducing water consumption and distribution will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Table COSE-2 presents the goals of this Element that will address the Strategic Growth Principles and their objectives identified in the preceding section. The goals also address the priority issues listed above and the resource-specific issues summarized in the following section. Realization of these goals will occur through ongoing and coordinated policy and strategy implementation.

TABLE COSE-2 CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT GOALS

Air Quality

Goal AQ 1 Per capita vehicle- miles-traveled countywide will be reduced consistent with statewide targets.

Goal AQ 2 The County will be a leader in implementing air quality programs and innovations.

Goal AQ 3 State and federal ambient air quality standards will, at a minimum, be attained and maintained.

Goal AQ 4 Greenhouse gas emissions from County operations and community-wide sources will be reduced from baseline levels by a minimum of 15% by 2020.

Goal AQ 5 The County will adapt to adverse climate change.



TABLE COSE-2**CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT GOALS****Biological Resources**

Goal BR 1 Native habitat and biodiversity will be protected, restored, and enhanced.

Goal BR 2 Threatened, rare, endangered, and sensitive species will be protected.

Goal BR 3 Maintain the acreage of native woodlands, forests, and trees at 2008 levels.

Goal BR 4 The natural structure and function of streams and riparian habitat will be protected and restored.

Goal BR 5 Wetlands will be preserved, restored, and enhanced.

Goal BR 6 The county's fisheries and aquatic habitats will be preserved and improved.

Goal BR 7 Significant marine resources will be protected.

Cultural Resources

Goal CR 1 The County will have a strong, positive community image that honors our history and cultural diversity.

Goal CR 2 The County will promote public awareness and support for the preservation of cultural resources in order to maintain the county's uniqueness and promote economic vitality.

Goal CR 3 The county's historical resources will be preserved and protected.

Goal CR 4 The county's known and potential Native American, archaeological and paleontological resources will be preserved and protected.

Energy

Goal E 1 The County will have an environmentally sustainable supply of energy for all county residents.

Goal E 2 Energy consumption at County facilities shall be reduced by 20% from 2006 levels by 2020.

Goal E 3 Energy efficiency and conservation will be promoted in both new and existing development.

Goal E 4 Green building practices will be integrated into all development.

Goal E 5 Recycling, waste diversion, and reuse programs will achieve as close to zero waste as possible.

Goal E 6 The use of renewable energy resources will be increased.

Goal E 7 Design, siting, and operation of non-renewable energy facilities will be environmentally appropriate.



TABLE COSE-2 CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT GOALS

Mineral Resources

Goal MN 1 Conservation and development of significant mineral deposits will be a high priority, but will be balanced with other County General Plan goals and policies.

Goal MN 2 Significant mineral resources will be protected from land uses that threaten their availability for future mining.

Goal MN 3 Balance mining of mineral resources with sensitive natural resources and existing adjacent uses

Open Space Resources

Goal OS 1 Important open space areas will be identified, protected, sustained, and where necessary, restored and reclaimed.

Goal OS 2 Open space resources will be protected and sustained on public lands.

Goal OS 3 Ongoing public education programs about conservation, protection, and stewardship of open space resources will be encouraged. (OSG 4)

Goal OS 4 Urban sprawl and inappropriate development of rural areas will be prevented.

Soil Resources

Goal SL 1 Soils will be protected from wind and water erosion, particularly that caused by poor soil management practices.

Goal SL 2 Watershed and ecological function will be maintained through soil conservation.

Goal SL 3 Important agricultural soils will be conserved.

Visual Resources

Goal VR1 The natural and agricultural landscape will continue to be the dominant view in rural parts of the county.

Goal VR 2 The natural and historic character and identity of rural areas will be protected.

Goal VR 3 The visual identities of communities will be preserved by maintaining rural separation between them.

Goal VR 4 Protect visual resource within visual sensitive resource areas (SRAs) for scenic corridors.

Goal VR 5 Views from scenic vistas and vista points will be protected.

Goal VR 6 A cohesive visual character will be maintained in urban areas.

Goal VR 7 Views of the night sky and its constellations of stars will be maintained.

Goal VR 8 Visual intrusions of signs will be minimized within public view corridors.

Goal VR 9 The visual effects of utility lines will be minimized.



TABLE COSE-2**CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT GOALS****Water Resources**

Goal WR 1 The County will have a reliable and secure regional water supply (IRWM).

Goal WR 2 The County will collaboratively manage groundwater resources to ensure sustainable supplies for all beneficial uses.

Goal WR 3 Excellent water quality will be maintained for the health of people and natural communities.

Goal WR 4 Per capita potable water use in the county will decline by 20 percent by 2020.

Goal WR 5 The best possible tools and methods available will be used to manage water resources.

Goal WR 6 Damage to life, structures, and natural resources from floods will be avoided.

Overview of Key Issues

This section provides an overview of the issues by topic or chapter title.

AIR QUALITY

The County recognizes the importance of clean air for a healthy environment and vibrant communities for current and future generations. The intent of the air quality goals, policies, and implementation strategies is to improve local and regional air quality and help reduce local contributions to climate change (i.e., greenhouse gas emissions). This will improve public health, boost the local economy, and reduce pollution damage to trees, crops, plants, lakes, animals, and buildings.

The current and projected air quality challenges for San Luis Obispo County are grouped into three categories: local air quality, regional air pollution, and global climate change. Past land use decisions have contributed to poorer air quality. Future growth can worsen the county's ozone and particulate matter problems. Global climate change can diminish the county's air quality and quality of life. However, changing development standards to encourage commercial and residential infill and development in and adjacent to existing urban areas can improve air quality by reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gases.



County government has an opportunity to provide leadership on air quality issues and lead by example.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The intent of the biological resources goals, policies, and implementation strategies is to identify and protect biological resources that are a critical component of the county's environmental, social, and economic well being. Biological resources include major ecosystems; threatened, rare, and endangered species and their habitats; native trees and vegetation; creeks and riparian areas; wetlands; fisheries; and marine resources. Individual species, habitat areas, ecosystems and migration patterns must be considered together in order to sustain biological resources.

Sustaining healthy ecosystems, preserving biodiversity and protecting diverse landscapes ensures a future that is healthy and vibrant ecologically, socially, and economically. Converting agricultural and rural lands to residential and urban uses adversely impacts wildlife and native species. (Also addressed in the Agriculture Element, refer to AGP 24.) Such changes can fragment habitats, reduce biodiversity, increase pollutant loads, and increase flooding. Careful planning for urban expansion for workforce housing needs is necessary to avoid impacts to biological resources.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The County recognizes that archaeological resources are “living resources,” meaning that the culture represented by these resources still thrives here. Preserving local history and cultural diversity helps us retain our links to the past and remain a dynamic and desirable place.

Cultural resources throughout the state and county are increasingly vulnerable to development pressures, growing use of our open spaces, changes in technology, and lack of funding for their repair and maintenance. The intent of the cultural resource goals, policies, and implementation strategies is to identify and protect areas, sites, and buildings having Native American, architectural, historical, archaeological, paleontological, or cultural



A mortar and pestle at Mission San Miguel.



significance. These resources contribute to the vitality and diversity of the county and its sense of place.

ENERGY

The intent of the energy goals, policies, and implementation strategies is to identify energy needs, conserve and use energy efficiently, develop and use local, renewable energy, and achieve energy-efficient development. The County recognizes that efficient use of energy and greater reliance on clean, renewable energy benefits the health of our residents, visitors and environment, and contributes to the county's and the region's economic vitality.

The major issues described in the Energy Chapter include energy conservation and efficiency, sustainable energy supplies, renewable energy sources, and green building. Energy conservation and efficiency means using energy more wisely. A sustainable energy supply will include greater reliance on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power. County operations are specifically targeted to pursue sustainable energy supplies.

MINERAL RESOURCES

The intent of the mineral resources goals, policies, and implementation strategies is to identify and protect mineral resources for present and future generations. Extraction of these resources makes a valuable contribution to the county's and region's economic vitality. The County recognizes the need to balance the economic benefit of mineral extraction with the protection of people and the environment from potential adverse effects of mining activities.

Mineral resources need to be protected so that they are available to the present and future generations that need them. However, mining of mineral resources can cause environmental harm; therefore, the exploitation of mineral resources needs to be balanced with the environmental effects of mining.



OPEN SPACE RESOURCES

The local Open Space Plan of the County is comprised of this Conservation and Open Space Element, together with the Agriculture Element and the Parks and Recreation Element, consistent with Government Code section 65560 et seq.

It is the intent of the open space goals, policies, and implementation strategies to conserve, protect, manage, and restore irreplaceable open space resources for current and future generations. This will result in scenic, recreational, health, safety, economic, and other benefits. The open space chapter addresses issues of special importance to open space and other resources. The goals and policies strive to balance what, at times, may be competing interests.

SOIL RESOURCES

The loss of soil resources affects many other natural resources. For example, soil erosion can reduce agricultural productivity, threaten air and water quality, and harm water-dependent species.

The intent of the soil resources goals, policies, and implementation strategies is to protect and conserve soils and to recognize their critical role in the county's watersheds. The soils in San Luis Obispo County are essential for preserving economic and environmental vitality and nourishing ecological habitats. They are also essential for the production of food, fiber, and other agricultural products.

VISUAL RESOURCES

The intent of the visual resource goals, policies and implementation strategies is to protect the visual character and identity of the county while respecting private property rights, in order to: 1) maintain a sense of place recognized by residents, 2) preserve scenic landscapes that are highly valued by residents and visitors, and 3) maintain a high quality visual environment that enhances tourism, real estate values and economic growth. The visual resources chapter guides the appropriate placement of development so that 1) the natural landscape continues to be the



Chorro Valley.



dominant view in rural parts of the county, and 2) in urban areas, visual character contributes to a robust sense of place.

WATER RESOURCES

The County recognizes water as a valuable and scarce resource; it is essential for the county's environmental, social, and economic well being, and for the public health. The intent of the water resources goals, policies, and implementation strategies is to achieve a sustainable water supply, protect water quality and natural communities, and control flooding.



*Salinas Dam Overflow,
April 2006.*

Water resource issues include water supply, groundwater monitoring and management, water quality, conservation, water resource management, environmental needs, and flood control. The competing demands on our limited supply of water mean we have difficult policy choices to guide future water use. Changing land uses in the county mean changes in water use and availability. Securing adequate water supply for all beneficial uses, especially agricultural land uses, is a priority of the General Plan. Beneficial uses also include environmental resources.

User Guide

This Element encompasses a broad range of complex issues and policies. The Element has two primary components: chapters and supporting appendices. Each chapter follows the same outline: a purpose statement; a brief introduction and overview of the topic; a listing of the major issues; a review of the relationship of the chapter to other elements, plans and programs; measures of success; goals, policies and implementation strategies; and an implementation approach.

Goals, policies, and implementation strategies are not listed in order of priority unless so stated. Measures of success are provided for the County and the public to determine when a goal or policy has been achieved. Text boxes with definitions of key terms, facts, photographs, and quotes are included in the margins



throughout the Element to highlight key terms, provide examples, and to make the Element more “reader-friendly.”

Most chapters include maps and figures that illustrate policies and implementation strategies. Maps are provided for information purposes. Some maps include a sample detailed perspective to allow the reader to see the spatial data available at a larger scale. Full-scale maps are available for viewing at the County’s [website](#). Figures may include tables, charts, and diagrams.

Appendices provide detailed information regarding the setting, existing conditions, and regulatory context for each chapter’s subject.

HOW TO READ THE ELEMENT

A General Plan is commonly referred to as a community’s “constitution” or “blueprint” for development and conservation. All General Plans, including this one, must address a host of concerns within a consistent, well-integrated policy framework. In implementing the General Plan, the Board of Supervisors (or its delegates) makes policy determinations in a manner that promotes the overall goals of the General Plan and the public welfare in accordance with existing resources, staffing, and priorities. Policy and program implementation will require reasonable and thoughtful consideration of other General Plan policies. Such implementation decisions will come up on a case-by-case basis as the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, County staff, and others work to implement the entire General Plan.

While inevitably some overlap remains among the General Plan elements, the Conservation and Open Space Element emphasizes protection and management of natural resources and how that integrates into land use planning processes. Other General Plan elements may still contain policies which address open space or conservation topics as part of other County objectives. For example, the:

- **Land Use and Circulation Element (LUE)** focuses on the types and intensities of development, and identifies strategic growth strategies that balance growth with natural



resource protection. The Land Use Element includes all of the area plans which apply land use combining designations (overlay zones) to identify and protect sensitive resources.

- **Safety Element (S)** is concerned mainly with avoiding hazards from fire, flood, and unstable land, including areas where agriculture and natural landscapes are often the most appropriate uses.
- **Parks and Recreation Element (PRE)** contains goals and policies to acquire, develop, and maintain parkland areas for passive and active recreation, and natural areas for passive recreation while protecting sensitive resources.
- **Agriculture Element (AG)** addresses agricultural issues. It is intended to balance protection of natural resources and open space with the needs of production agriculture and to minimize impacts to ongoing production agriculture.
- **Economic Element** promotes a diverse and balanced economy that is dependent upon natural resource conservation and protection.
- **Local Coastal Plan (LCP)** addresses protection of natural resources within the designated coastal zone.
- **Off-Shore Energy Element** includes resource discussions covering biological, fisheries and air quality issues as they relate to off-shore energy development.

Table COSE-3 depicts the interconnectedness of this Element with other elements of the General Plan. A symbol in the table denotes when chapters of this Element contain goals, policies, implementation strategies that directly relate to the implementation of another General Plan element.

In addition, references to complementary policies or implementation strategies may follow a policy or program to emphasize the interconnectedness. As an example, the following policy includes a reference to AGP 11 in parenthesis. AGP 11 refers to Agriculture Element Policy 11 located in the Agriculture Element.



EXAMPLE**Policy WR 1.7 Agricultural operations**

Groundwater management strategies will give priority to agricultural operations. Protect agricultural water supplies from competition by incompatible development through land use controls. (See also AGP 11 in the Agriculture Element.)

TABLE COSE-3 RELATIONSHIP OF CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT GOALS AND POLICIES TO OTHER GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS

County General Plan Element	Conservation and Open Space Element Chapters								
	Air	Bio- logical	Cul- tural	Energy	Mineral	Open Space	Soils	Visual	Water
Agriculture	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆	◆	◆	◆
Economic	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Housing	◆	◆		◆				◆	◆
Land Use and Circulation	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Local Coastal Plan	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Noise				◆	◆	◆			
Off-Shore Energy	◆	◆		◆				◆	◆
Parks and Recreation	◆	◆	◆			◆			◆
Safety	◆	◆		◆	◆		◆		◆

Basic Building Blocks of the Plan

The goals, policies, and implementation strategies in this Element are used to evaluate proposed development projects and to minimize the impact of County operations upon natural resources. The following definitions apply.

- **Goal:** An expression of community values and desired outcomes, an ideal future result or condition, based on public health, safety, or general welfare.
- **Policy:** A statement derived from a goal that represents the County's adopted position and guides decision-making toward the goal.



- **Implementation Strategy:** A specific set of actions, mechanisms, partnerships, standards, or procedures to carry out goals and policies.

Policies and implementation strategies are typically accompanied by a heading or title. Headings and titles, like text boxes in the margins, are provided for convenience only. If headings, titles, or text boxes conflict with the goal, policy, or implementation strategy text they accompany, the text shall govern.

Every provision of this Element is guided by the following principle: “to the extent legally permitted.” The County will not interpret any of the provisions in a manner that violates state or federal law.

Please refer to **Chapter 11** for a listing of the goals and accompanying policy titles for each chapter. **Chapter 12** provides a glossary of terms used in this Element.

Implementation

Following adoption by the Board of Supervisors, the goals, policies, and implementation strategies become effective and have full force and effect. They guide all County decisions and actions.

Each chapter in this Element concludes with a table that summarizes the County department or other agency that has primary responsibility for carrying out each implementation strategy. In addition, the table summarizes the priority, estimated year of initiation, and potential source of funding of each strategy. The actual timeframe for implementing the strategies is dependent upon the availability of adequate staff and funding. The following principles guide the implementation strategies.

- In some cases, implementation of the Element will occur through revisions to other land use plans and regulations. Revisions to existing regulations or development of new codes or ordinances will occur through a public hearing process.



- Implementation can take time, especially when needed resources are limited and required for more than one program.
- Because implementation can take time, the Board of Supervisors (or its delegates) may need to prioritize programs.

Implementation strategies may be adjusted over time based on new information, changing circumstances, and evaluation of their effectiveness, so long as they remain consistent with the intent of the Element.

The Element, due to its comprehensive nature, includes many implementation strategies that will often require more than one County department to ensure success. In addition, implementation of the Element will be an ongoing process through buildout of the General Plan. Because implementation can take time and resources, this Element relies on three overarching implementation strategies.

◇ ***Implementation Strategy COSE-1 Conservation and Open Space Committee***

Within 90 days of adoption of this Element, County staff shall request that the Board of Supervisors appoint members of a Conservation and Open Space Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to:

- Facilitate implementation of the Element;
- Coordinate with staff to prioritize implementation strategies;
- Identify funding sources on an annual basis;
- Review policies and ordinances affecting the Element;
- Increase public awareness of issues affecting open space resources, including the relationship between open space and agricultural issues;
- Provide a wider range of advice to the Board of Supervisors.



The Committee shall convene on a quarterly basis and include representatives as determined by the Board. The Committee will be staffed by the Department of Planning and Building and include the Climate Action Team as a subcommittee. (Refer to Air Quality Implementation Strategy 4.2.1) The responsibilities of the Committee shall be established to coordinate with the responsibilities of other County advisory commissions, committees, or boards without conflicts or overlap.

◇ **Implementation Strategy COSE-2 Conservation and Open Space Mitigation Program**

Within one year of adoption of this Element, conduct a feasibility study of a Conservation and Open Space Mitigation Program that would establish an in-lieu fee, mitigation program, open space district, and/or land bank to offset or mitigate potential development project impacts to the environmental resources identified in this Element, including cumulative impacts. The feasibility study should consider use of a land bank concept for a variety of open space purposes. The feasibility study shall evaluate the use of in-lieu or mitigation fees for implementation of this Element, consistent with AB 1600. Develop and implement the Program based on the findings of the feasibility study.

◇ **Implementation Strategy COSE-3 Conservation Manager**

Establish the position of Conservation Manager so that certain COSE-related functions are consolidated in a County position. The responsibilities of the Conservation Manager could include the following:

- a. Work with advisory committees and County departments to identify natural resource and open space conservation needs and opportunities.
- b. Apply for grants and secure funding to further natural resource conservation opportunities.
- c. Assist in establishing land banking and resource mitigation programs.
- d. Oversee and coordinate natural resource programs related to the protection and conservation of public open space.
- e. Integrate natural resource management concepts throughout County operations.

The legal requirements for enactment of development impact fee program are set forth in Government Code §§ 66000-66025 (the "Mitigation Fee Act"), the bulk of which were adopted as 1987's AB 1600 and thus are commonly referred to as "AB 1600 requirements."

